



Online Class and Collaborative Activities



The online classroom

Online classroom technology allows an educator to hold synchronous, or real time, sessions with students. These sessions (or classes or tutorials) generally replace the face to face classes delivered in a traditional teaching approach. Online classes can be recorded, capturing audio, video, text chat, and content, for access and review by students who cannot attend. The online classroom can be daunting to begin with, many educators report that their first feeling in the online class is of isolation and wonder 'is there anyone out there?'

But there are several things you can do to help overcome this initial feeling. One way to surmount the potential silence of an online classroom is to get students to collaborate, either with the whole class or in smaller groups. Careful planning and implementation of collaborative activities will encourage student engagement in the class.

Interactive online classes are more beneficial, and fun, to both the educator and the student. Using online collaborative activities within the classroom can encourage interaction. These types of activities can be used throughout the online course. Here are some best practice tips.



<i>Running online classes – Getting Started</i>	<i>Collaborative activities for the online class</i>
Familiarise yourself with the technology well in advance of the class. Ask a colleague or friend to join your test class as a student and make sure that everything works.	Create polls in advance of the class. Use closed response type questions when you want to share the quantitative results. For example, you might ask students to tick which category applies to a particular phenomenon. Use the variety of responses to get a discussion going by asking students to justify their response.
Either schedule an introductory class, where students log in to test the technology and that their mic, camera and any other tools you will use are working, OR, do this at the beginning of the first session. Inform students to keep the mic on mute unless they are speaking to the class.	Use open type questions when you want to check if students have understood a particular concept. Ask them to type into the chat or give them shared access to the whiteboard. Make sure to go through the responses and clarify any misunderstandings.
Prepare and plan your class well, leaving time at the end to wrap up. Remember that some activities may take more time online than face to face. For example, you may need to take time to read the online chat messages.	Use breakout rooms to get your students to collaborate and then present back to the main classroom. Request that students engage with the learning materials prior to the class so that they are ready to collaborate.
Have an introductory slide available in the class that welcomes the students. Join about 15 minutes in advance of the class. You can be on mute, but it will inform students that you are there. Use this slide to remind them to check mic etc and to put it on mute.	Share your screen with the students as you access a website, document or run relevant software. For example, share an online collaboration space such as a Google Doc where all students can add text comments.
Put a reminder on your first slide to start the recording of the session. Set a reminder to check the chat box every 5 or 10 minutes and be sure to respond to students. Check for the hands up option regularly also.	Use a flipped classroom approach. Divide your students into groups and get them to prepare an artefact that they are required to present to the whole class in the next online class.



Most online classroom platforms allow the same functionality as the traditional class; students can ask questions, work in groups (using breakout rooms, see link below), draw on the whiteboard, and respond to questions. Remember to maintain social presence and use students' names when referring to their responses.

Flipped Classroom approach

Another approach that promotes student engagement in the class is what is known as the flipped classroom. Students are required to engage constructively with the content, prior to coming to class. Request students to prepare a learning artefact, such as a short screencast or document, related to the learning material, and discuss these in the class. The synchronous class provides time for feedback

You may need to allocate an incentive for these types of activities, such as a mark towards the grade, or a structured output that will help with a subsequent student assignment. When students get some 'credit' for doing work, they are more likely to engage.

Some Tools that you can use for online classroom and collaborative activities

Adobe Connect



- Adobe Connect, which is similar to Zoom, is a virtual classroom / meeting facility that allows discussions to take place by using microphones or the text chat functionality. Screens and slides can be shared and groupwork facilitated using breakout rooms. It is widely used to enable online classrooms.

Zoom



- Zoom, a virtual meeting and classroom software helps universities improve student outcomes with secure video communication services for hybrid classrooms, office hours, administrative meetings, and more. Zoom is an ideal tool to facilitate collaboration - connecting teachers to students and students to students. Both staff and students have their own personal account which allows them to have unlimited online meetings which inevitably facilitate collaboration.

Wiki



- A wiki is a collection of collaboratively authored web documents. Basically, a wiki page is a web page everyone in your class can create together, right in the browser, without needing to know HTML. A wiki starts with one front page. Each author can add other pages to the wiki by simply creating a link to a page that doesn't exist yet.

Wordpress



- One of the most popular blogging platforms in the world with one third of the websites in the world powered by Wordpress. It has been widely used by teachers and students as a portfolio tool.

Trello



- Trello's boards, lists, and cards enable you to organize and prioritize collaborative projects. Dive into the details by adding comments, attachments, due dates, and more directly to Trello cards.

Further Resources:

eLearning Industry: [5 Online Group Collaboration Ideas For Your Next eLearning Course](#)

Learning Solutions: [Addicted to Virtual Classroom Breakout Rooms? Get Help Now!](#)

References

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